



# Pick Your Path to Health

## Drug Abuse: Helping Yourself Quit

### The Backstabber

Addiction is a difficult and complicated disease. It is like a false friend. At first, a drug convinces you that it's the best thing going around. It is your friend. It helps you feel better. It's always there when you need it. It's what's been missing in your life...But, some time passes and down the line, it shows its true face. It becomes a "backstabber." It now wants something from you. It wants YOU. Your mind, your body and your life. It doesn't matter what you want anymore. Eventually you lose control over your life, you start getting into trouble, missing work, and getting sick. You neglect yourself and your family, and begin to lose all the things you've worked so hard to get. The worst thing is you really don't know how this all happened. This isn't what you wanted. That's how addiction works. It is sneaky, selfish, and tricky and will take your life away.

Drugs, prescription or illegal, are often used to deal with pain. People use drugs to deal with a physical pain or to perhaps cover up feelings of guilt, anxiety, stress, depression or powerlessness. "I was a garbage head. I used any and all drugs. If it changed my mood, I'd use it...painkillers, heroine, alcohol. I started drinking when I was 13. By the time I was 24, I had smoked pot, taken LSD, cocaine, peyote and was addicted to painkillers for my migraines," says Suzanne Robin of Alexandria, Virginia, as she recounts her long-time struggle with drugs. "At first it was heaven, but then things started going down hill. I was wrecking my car or someone else's car every week. There were days when I couldn't remember anything I had done. I went into rehab three times, been locked up three times and committed to a psychiatric ward twice. I actually managed to stay straight for 11 years, even after my daughter was in a serious accident, and I was diagnosed with breast cancer. But then my mother died and I relapsed again," she says. Suzanne is not alone. She is one of the four million women in this country who has a drug addiction and needs help.

### Women and Drugs

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, research indicates that women can become addicted quickly to drugs, even after casual or one-time use. "Although there are no physiological differences

between men and women that would make women more vulnerable to drug abuse, there is a connection between women who seek treatment for drug problems and domestic violence, childhood abuse or being a crime victim," says Robert Sage, Ph.D., senior vice president of the Addiction Research and Treatment Corporation in Brooklyn, New York. "Women suffering from depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress can become quickly addicted after being introduced to heroine or cocaine. Physicians are also more apt to prescribe drugs for women for depression and anxiety than for men because women more often discuss such conditions."

## **Getting Your Life Back**

If you are addicted to marijuana, cocaine, prescription drugs, or any substance, quitting is not easy. But it can be done. There is a lot of support available for women and their families who need assistance in getting off drugs and in getting continued support.

The first step to recovery is to acknowledge your addiction and to take steps to getting better. Your addiction may be purely physical, or you may use drugs because you are depressed or have other painful problems. No matter what, there are steps to recovery.

## **Steps to Recovery**

Try the following steps and resources to help you, or a family member, recover from drugs.

- **Get support:** Tell your family, close friends, your doctor that you want to quit drugs and need their support. Get all the support you need. It is important to reach out to others, so they can reach back.
- **Inform your doctors:** Make sure your doctors and dentist know that you are in recovery and cannot take addictive substances of any kind.
- **Surround yourself with positive people:** Stay away from negative people, places, and things. Choose friends and situations in which drugs are not a factor.
- **Find ways to deal with stress, emotional problems:** Exercise, take a dance, kickboxing or yoga class, keep a journal of your feelings, talk to friends, get professional counseling.
- **Join a support group:** Join a local alcoholics anonymous/drugs anonymous support group. Look in the phone book, contact your local health department or hospital for groups. They are usually free and are usually confidential.

- **Get involved** in community activities: Join or start a drug prevention campaign in your community by talking and working with local businesses, churches or community centers to let young people know the facts about drugs and alternatives to taking drugs.
- **Look for personal risk factors:** Be aware of your risk factors-do you have a family history of drug or addiction problems? Do you bottle up emotions or have difficulty with self-esteem? If so, take steps to deal with those issues.
- **Get help from the job:** Ask if your job has an employment assistance program that will help you with your drug addiction. Many employers offer some sort of assistance for employees.
- **Get information from local or government agencies:** Get pamphlets on drug addiction prevention and treatment from government agencies. There is a lot of information for parents on how to approach and help their children who may have drug problems and also information on drug abuse prevention. (See resources below).

Although Suzanne has been battling drug addiction for a long time, she says she won't give up. "I've had to change my entire life. I had to stop taking care of everyone else and concentrate on taking care of me. I think most women are taught to be caregivers and then they never know what they want. I'm trying to change that. I'm still working on it," she explains.

You too can get yourself onto a path to health and recovery; help is out there.

For additional information and assistance for treatment of drug abuse, contact:

- National Women's Health Information Center, Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1-800-994-WOMAN, [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov).
- National Drug Information Treatment and Referral Line, 1-800-662-HELP, [www.samhsa.gov/csatsat.htm](http://www.samhsa.gov/csatsat.htm).
- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, 1-800-729-6686, [www.health.org](http://www.health.org).
- National Institute on Drug Abuse, 301-443-1124, [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov).
- American Council for Drug Education, 1-800-488-3784, [www.acde.org](http://www.acde.org).

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."*